

TLK: The Outsider

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Summary: This is a short short story about how the lioness who would become Zira was born. (N.B: I use the name Almasi for Uru, because "almasi" is the Swahili word for "diamond [the stone].")

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The Outsider

The Northern and Southern prides had been at war for years. Now, that the old kings had died, the lions were ready for peace. The king of the South felt the best way to accomplish this was by betrothing his daughter, Princess Uzuri, to the Northern king's only son, Prince Ahadi. The Northern king agreed to this, and everyone in the savannah was filled with great joy. Then, came the day when Uzuri and Ahadi met.

The royal family was assembled on the summit of Pride Rock to welcome their new allies. The Southern royals were first welcomed by King Mohautu, a grayish chestnut lion with a black mane, and Queen Makeda, a brown lioness with red eyes. As Mohautu gave a grand welcome speech, Prince Ahadi stood closer to the royal den with his friend, Ndugu. The prince looked just like the king, but he inherited his mother's pelt color. Ndugu was a bit darker than the prince, with a deep auburn pelt, red brown eyes, and a deep brown mane.

"Can you see her?" Ahadi asked.

"No! YES!" his friend excitedly replied.

"What does she look like?" Ahadi urged.

"Beautiful," Ndugu said dreamily.

"Really." The prince smiled.

"Like the sun," his friend replied.

"Does she seem glad to be here?" the prince asked.

"Well, she is smiling." His friend shrugged.

"Good," Ahadi sighed in relief.

Now the royal couple was leading their guests towards the den to be welcomed by Ahadi. The two young lions bowed while the queen introduced them: "This is Prince Ahadi and Ndugu son of Jomo, our greatest warrior."

His father proceeded to introduce a pair tawny lions with brown dorsal stripes: King Nguvu and Prince Mkaidi. Then they cleared a path for someone.

"and this is Princess Uzuri," he said as the beautiful lioness walked towards them.

She was the most majestic lioness he had ever seen—tall and built like a huntress. Her perfectly groomed tawny fur had a golden yellow glimmer, her violet eyes sparkled, and she walked with a regal air. Ahadi was mesmerized. She bowed, but did not say a word.

"Son," Makeda said, "It is time for you to give the princess a tour of her new home. Zuzu will accompany you."

"Yes, Mother," the prince replied. Then he, Uzuri, and Zuzu the hornbill began the tour.

Ahadi showed Uzuri the Pride Lands and introduced her to everyone as his bride. Then, they returned to Pride Rock and saw a golden yellow lioness with a red tail tuft. Uzuri noticed Ahadi smile and get a sparkle in his eyes.

"Ahadi," the lioness greeted him.

"Almasi—hello," he breathed.

"This must be your bride," she said cheerfully.

"Oh, yes, this is Princess Uzuri," he faltered.

"My name is Almasi, I've heard so much about you." She smiled at Uzuri. "Welcome."

"Thank you, Almasi," the princess said politely. "I'm already feeling at home."

When Almasi left, Uzuri couldn't help but notice how Ahadi's eyes followed the small, slender creature until she was gone.

Zuzu loudly cleared her throat to get the prince's attention.

"Ahadi and Almasi are childhood friends," Zuzu assured the princess.

"Yes, we grew up together." He nodded.

"She has an exotic look," Uzuri ventured.

"She was adopted," Zuzu clarified.

"And everyone loves her," Ahadi added.

"I like her too." Uzuri smirked.

"We'd better go up," Zuzu urged.

That night, the southern royals stayed in the den. Princess Uzuri slept peacefully in the corner with her family, until she heard chanting. She got up and went outside, where the chanting was louder. It was not very late, so she ventured into the savannah following the mysterious voice beckoning in Swahili. At last, she found a small group of animals making music by the lake. Among them was an elder white lioness with golden eyes and gourds tied around her tail. It was her voice that the princess heard.

"You're Busara," Uzuri awed and quickly bowed.

"Why are you here child?" she asked.

"I heard you chanting," Uzuri replied.

"So," the elder said.

"Please tell me what's happening," she begged.

"You can't sleep because you know that you are about to do something very wrong," Busara charged her.

"Please explain," the princess cried.

Busara pointed to the water. Uzuri looked and saw a small orphaned cub with a mangy coat. A well-groomed cub crawled towards it. Then Mohatu appeared in the background.

"Long before the peace treaty was made, Mohatu betrothed young Ahadi to Almasi," Busara elaborated.

Uzuri began to cry.

"Save your tears," the elder urged.

"But there's nothing I can do. I am supposed to marry into this pride," she struggled.

"And you will. There is a cave past the tree of life, go and wait for your husband" Busara ordered.

"Yes, ma'am," the princess complied.

The animals returned to playing their song. As Busara chanted, a young lion approached them and bowed. It was Ndugu.

Busara placed her paw under his chin and lifted his head up. "Tell me what troubles you?" she asked in a maternal tone.

"Grandma, I am jealous of my friend," Ndugu confessed.

"Why is that?" she asked.

"He is betrothed to a most beautiful lioness and Iâ€¦I am falling in love with her," Ndugu explained.

"Who is you betrothed?" she pried.

"The king said I am to marry Almasi," he replied.

"Then go to your bride," Busara ordered.

"Grandma, I don't know if I can love her," Ndugu cried.

"My friend the Medicine Man can help." Busara turned to the mandrill on her right.

The Medicine Man smiled mysteriously and set a gourd in front Ndugu that was filled with pungent red water.

"Drink this potion and you will fall in love with the right lioness," Busara explained.

Ndugu obeyed. Once he finished the potion he felt very dizzy.

Busara nodded to a pair of monkeys and they led Ndugu past the tree of life, and stopped at a cave.

Once he stumbled inside, he lied down and saw Almasi gazing at him curiously. How kind of her to care about him. He licked her cheek and then she giggled. That morning, he awoke to the angry green eyes of King Mohatu. The other royals were with him.

"What have you done?" Mohatu growled.

"What do you mean?" he innocently asked. "I am with Almaâ€¦" he paused as the lioness next to him awoke. "Princess!" he cried in shock. "It was a mistake! Your majesties, believe me I had no idea it was her," Ndugu pleaded.

"You malign my sister!" Mkaidi roared.

"No," Ndugu replied.

"Please," Uzuri interrupted, "It was my fault."

Everyone was shocked.

"No!" Mkaidi shouted, "My sister would never do such a thing."

"I have," she replied, "The honor of marrying Ahadi belongs to another."

"You have ruined everything!" her father cried.

"He is in line to rule, so none of the agreements have been broken," the princess declared.

"Ndugu, this is a form of treason and the punishment for that is exile," Mohatu replied.

Suddenly, King Mohatu felt the eyes of Busara and the kings of the past peering into him. He could hear the voices of the old kings in his head. So he paused and said, "You may continue to live in the Pride Lands as outsiders. You are no longer our subjects or members of this family. That is my final word."

The royals left, and then Busara smiled at the young couple before disappearing into the savannah. Later that day, Uzuri listened to Ahadi and Almasi roar with the king and queen. Years later, the Northern pride had many young energetic cubs. At sunset, an old lioness called the little ones back to the den to sleep. Meanwhile, in a small cave away from Pride Rock, Uzuri was holding her newborn cub. It had very light tawny fur and a brown dorsal stripe.

"She's beautiful, like you," Ndugu said.

Suddenly they heard twigs snapping. Ndugu stepped outside, and there was Ahadi.

"My friend," Ahadi began.

"It has been a long time," Ndugu replied.

"Yesâ€¦you may have heard that my father passed," he struggled. "So, as king, I welcome you back to our pride."

Uzuri wept tears of joy, and her little cub tried to dry them with her tiny paws.

"Brother," Ndugu cried and embraced him.

Ahadi squeezed him. Once the two lions heard the cub mew, they regained their composure.

"Now, who is this beautiful cub?" Ahadi asked.

"Your majesty, this is Zenobia," Uzuri replied.

"Aaa that is the perfect name for a princess." Ahadi smiled.

The next day, Ndugu's family was formally welcomed back into the pride. After they all roared together, an auburn lioness came over and hugged Ndugu.

"Mother!" he cried.

"This is your sister, Sarabi," she introduced a dark beige cub. "She is engaged to Prince Mufasa."

"How wonderful!" He beamed.

"What a beautiful baby," his mother cried. She took Zenobia from Uzuri and signaled the lioness to follow her into the den.

Uzuri lied down and her mother-in-law placed the cub in her arms.

"Thank you, Nafasi," Uzuri replied.

"Welcome home, my daughter." Nafasi smiled.

Below Pride Rock, Busara stood watching the younger lions. A cool breeze blew towards her. Then, the gourds fell off her tail and rolled into the savannah. They went past the giraffes, escaped a pair of monkeys and stopped at the feet of a mandrill. It was the Medicine Man. He stared at them curiously as he sat beneath the tree of life. Suddenly, a thought struck him.

"Busara?" he cried.

A gust of wind hit the tree, causing a branch to snap and fall into his lap. He smiled knowingly and wrapped his hands around the stick.

"I will do my best," he said quietly.

End
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